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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000846

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: FRELIMO FAILS TO RE-NOMINATE POPULAR MAYOR OF
MAPUTO

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Todd Amani, Reasons 1.4(b+d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: On August 23, members of the FRELIMO Committee for the City of Maputo met behind closed doors for 13 hours to determine the party's candidate for the upcoming November 19 municipal elections. In a surprise move, members selected current Minister of Youth and Sport David Simango over popular and competent incumbent Mayor, Eneas Comiche by a 67 percent margin. Both Comiche and Simango are important members in the ruling-FRELIMO party, and will likely continue to figure prominently in the party structure; however, justifications for the party's desertion of Mayor Comiche suggest dissatisfaction with his successful 5-year term, which bolstered popular perceptions of his integrity. Members of the diplomatic community conclude that failure to re-nominate Comiche is President Guebuza's way of sending a message that party loyalty is more important than good governance. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Beginning in early August, FRELIMO neighborhood committees met to carry-out the preliminary selection of party candidates for the municipal elections. The committees chose Minister of Youth and Sport David Simango and Chair of the Maputo Municipal Assembly Generosa Cossa as potential options to run against front runner Mayor Eneas Comiche, who as the incumbent, was automatically selected to the August 23 deciding round. Surprising everyone, the FRELIMO Committee for the City of Maputo met behind closed doors and chose a relative unknown in David Simango by a wide margin of 67 percent.

COMICHE POPULAR AND IMPROVING CITY, SO WHY NOT REELECT?

13. (C) The position of Mayor of Maputo is among the most powerful non-Cabinet positions in Mozambique, and Comiche is recognized for his relative integrity and technocratic skills, though not known as a natural politician. A member of the elite fifteen-person FRELIMO Political Committee and a close confidant of former President Chissano, Comiche has visibly improved roads, lighting, traffic, garbage collection, sanitation, sewers, and markets in the capital city during his 5-year term; and likely would have been uncontested had FRELIMO re-nominated him. Comiche is known for his integrity, halting construction on city land illegally sold by his predecessor to wealthy and influential residents. News reports suggest that Comiche's stance against corruption may have made him an enemy of businessmen with strong connections to FRELIMO, or even FRELIMO leadership with strong business interests. Simango, on the other hand, is considered a seasoned politician with allegiances with whoever is in power, and observers suggest that he will overlook corruption issues in Maputo.

POLITICAL SPACE FOR THIRD PARTY?

14. (SBU) Maputo residents appear surprised by FRELIMO's decision not to re-nominate Comiche, and many are disappointed with the party's unusual decision to replace him. RENAMO has yet to put forward a candidate, and it is unlikely that they will be competitive in Maputo's mayoral race, though FRELIMO's decision to nominate Simango may mean that the opposition will gain a few more votes on election day. Another possibility includes voters choosing to vote in larger numbers for Philippe Gagnaux's Together for the City (JPC), a third party in Maputo that already holds some seats on the Municipal Council. Gagnaux, though considered an outsider, has a strong reputation for integrity and even-handedness on the Maputo political stage.

PROCESS OVERSEEN BY GUEBUZA'S HEAVY LIFTERS

15. (C) The August 23 vote was unusually overseen by Minister of Planning and Development Aiuba Cuereneia, called the "other Prime Minister" by those familiar with his role in FRELIMO; and by Pedro Taimo, a wealthy and corrupt confidant of Guebuza. (Comment: Taimo allegedly made money by means of his position with the Ministry of Labor skimming a percentage of remittances from Mozambicans working in East Germany during the 1980s. He later supposedly consolidated his wealth and influence taking a percentage of remittances from Mozambican workers in South Africa who use the Ministry of Labor to send money to their families in Mozambique. He is also rumored to have assisted senior party leadership and their families with financial transactions in South Africa. Though fired by Guebuza under allegations of corruption, his

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power within the party does not appear to have waned. End Comment). Taimo announced the August 23 results nominating Simango as the mayoral candidate, and Cuereneia made comments following the surprise results about Simango being "the right candidate," which seemed oddly out of place given Comiche's popularity in the city. This combined with Simango's statements about the results reflecting FRELIMO's "culture of democracy" raise serious questions about the drivers of the party's decision-making process.

COMMENT: STRANGE THINGS ARE AFOOT IN MAPUTO

16. (C) FRELIMO's decision not to re-nominate Comiche, suggests that either he is the latest Chissano confidant to fall out of favor with Guebuza, or perhaps Comiche displayed a bit too much integrity for the taste of senior FRELIMO leadership. The logic behind this surprise FRELIMO decision eludes most political watchers, who believed until recently that Comiche would serve a second term as Mayor of Maputo. Several senior European diplomats told the DCM and PolChief on August 26 that they believe FRELIMO's vote for Simango indicates Guebuza's preference for party loyalty over transparency and governance. Nonetheless, voter dissatisfaction with FRELIMO's heavy-handedness may provide a better opportunity for RENAMO or JPC to be more competitive in Maputo's November municipal elections.
Chapman